

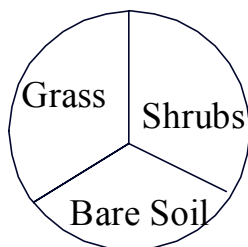


# THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 2      Issue 1      March 2003

This newsletter is targeted at quail cooperators and sportspeople in north and west Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, University Outreach and

Extension and the Heartland Chapter of Quail Unlimited. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact [bill.white@mo.usda.gov](mailto:bill.white@mo.usda.gov) or 816-232-6555 x136.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use shrubs as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide

bare ground with row crops, food plots or light disking right next to the shrubby area.

## Good Things Happening for Quail in Missouri

This winter has seen the advent of several new initiatives for quail in Missouri and we thought you would like to know about them!

- A \$10,000 grant from the USDA EQIP Educational Assistance Fund will provide seed money to produce and distribute a how-to video on quail practices. The Conservation Department will produce the video. We hope to have it available to the public by October.
- Check out [www.coveyheadquarters.com](http://www.coveyheadquarters.com) This website is sponsored by the Heartland Chapter of Quail Unlimited serving Andrew, Buchanan, Clinton and Dekalb counties. This website contains articles from past issues of The Covey Headquarters and some Conservation Department publications not found elsewhere on the web.
- The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) is a plan to increase quail throughout 22 southeastern states. It gives specific goals for general habitat regions in each state. A February 1 Quail Unlimited Symposium at Overland Park, KS kicked off the NBCI for Missouri and Kansas.
- For Missouri's part in the NBCI, the Conservation Department developed a new Department Strategic Quail Plan which directs each of the Department's 8 regions to develop regional quail plans that address public and private lands. A Missouri quail recovery coordinator will be hired in 2003.

- The Conservation Department is upgrading its Quail Management booklet (circa 1980). The new version will reflect the latest thinking and techniques for quail restoration. It should be available this summer.

## Prescribed Burning

As of this writing, drought still grips much of NW and western MO. If these conditions persist into the spring burning season, we encourage you to postpone your burning. Wildfire hazards resulting from your prescribed burn efforts will be at an all time high under these conditions. Proper burning conditions will return with adequate moisture to saturate heavy fuels such as dead limbs and logs. When burning, the surface of the ground and the litter layer in your grass field should be damp to the touch.

Consider postponing any burning on native grass until at least late summer if adequate moisture returns. This would be a better burn in terms of quail habitat.

## 4 Letter Words – Remember Them!!!!

**Disk** – October through April to generate bare ground and weeds.

**Burn** – Time your burns to encourage legumes, bare ground and weeds. Discourage grass density.

**Thin** – Get sunlight to the ground in woodlands and edges to encourage weeds and shrubs.

**Weed** – Quail need weeds for broodrearing and winter food.

**Food Plot** – OK, this is two 4 letter words, but, what better way to get bare ground and weeds!!!!



**Edge** – Do the edges of your fields go from trees to grass or trees to crops? There needs to be a transition between these cover types. Create an edge that contains shrubs or weeds to encourage quail.

## What Do You Mean Bare Ground?

“I have a feedlot with bare ground, will that do?” “I have bare ground around the trees in the pasture, is that enough?” ABSOLUTELY NOT!!!!

One requirement of bare ground is that it has an overhead canopy to protect broods and adults. For brood rearing the canopy should be provided by annual plants such as weeds or crops. Where light disking is done to create bare ground, the ideal is to get some annual weeds/legumes mixed in with the grass canopy. The bare ground quail are looking for is utilized by quail broods and adults alike for feeding, loafing and dusting. Without it

the quail will be few and far between on your property. **Examples of bare ground are food plots, weed patches, row crops and areas of grass that have been burned or light disked to create at least 30% bare ground.**

The more annual plants (weeds) you have, the more insects and seeds are available to quail. Even covey headquarters need bare ground and the canopy there would be shrubs or downed trees.

## **What Does A COVEY HEADQUARTERS Look Like?**

A covey headquarters is generally a clump of shrubs. It is that favorite hunting spot where you can usually count on getting up a covey of quail on a sunny afternoon. Often a dead fallen tree or area of tall weeds are used as a covey headquarters. The covey headquarters needs to meet certain criteria:

- \*Minimum 1250-1500 square feet in size
- \*Stems average 1-3 feet apart and have an upright growth habit
- \*Overhead canopy at 3-12 feet
- \*Best shrubs for NW and W Missouri include American plum, grey dogwood, blackberry
- \*A large portion of the understory must be bare ground.
- \*Adjacent to bare ground and diverse managed grass/legume/weed



While there are exceptions to these criteria, strive to get your headquarters to look like this. OR drop trees in your fencelines, draws and woodland edges to create an alternative covey headquarters. It is still necessary to have the bare ground component here. Several landowners tell us that the quail will start using these areas within weeks after dropping the trees. After a few years of decay, the downed trees lose their appeal to quail. With this in mind, it is best to drop some trees each year. Recommendations are to drop a 50 foot section of fenceline or draw, then skip about 200-300 feet and drop another 50 foot section. Each year drop additional sections until the entire draw or fenceline has been treated. A couple of people can do several of these 50 foot sections in an afternoon.

It appears that potential covey headquarters with an overstory of trees are not preferred by quail. Likewise, an old thicket of hazelnut with stems a few inches apart or the very old plum thickets do not meet the headquarters criteria. Old plum thickets have very few stems and the growth is no longer upright, it might be best to renovate these older plum thickets with a chainsaw or clipper to encourage sprouting and upright growth.

## **Predators and Quail – Let's Tie It All Together**

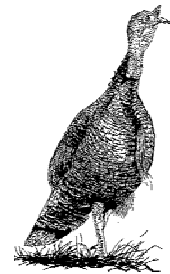
The past 3 issues of The Covey Headquarters have presented much of what is known about predators and quail. Let's summarize and pull all that information together.

1. Turkey and quail researchers alike have never found evidence of quail being eaten by turkey. There have been enough radio-collared birds, video surveillance and year round food habit studies to find that evidence.....if it actually occurs. People may claim they shot a turkey with quail chicks in the crop. However, if you think of when turkey hunting seasons occur and when quail hatch, you will realize that these people are indeed poachers.....or liars.....or both.

2. Predators seem to be on the increase, but study after study and landowner after landowner have shown that habitat work increases quail populations, despite the predators. Predator trapping alone does not significantly increase quail (North Carolina State University). Studies show that coyotes, red-tailed hawks, owls, bobcats and other large predators actually eat more coons, skunks, snakes and opossums than they eat quail. So, we need some predators. Another study concentrated predator control efforts on raccoons and snakes (Tall Timbers Research Station). Take away those predators and the cotton rat population exploded. The study site lost just as many quail nests as before the trapping. There is a balance in nature. Wanton killing of predators will not solve any problems.

3. Raccoons and snakes are the number 1 quail nest predators in Missouri (Missouri Department of Conservation). Mostly responsible for the 56% loss of quail nests each year, BUT

4. We can keep predators from getting the upper hand by doing management practices for quail. Owls and hawks that feed on quail hunt from perches in trees. By dropping trees in fencerows and draws we are limiting the hunting territories for these predators (Mississippi State University). Harvesting suitable trees for lumber, posts, and firewood will also help. The layers of trash that build up in CRP fields attract mice and voles, which in turn attract the foxes, coyotes, hawks and snakes. Burning actually has a negative effect on several species of mice and voles (MO Fish and Wildlife Information System). In addition, burning or light disking with the goal of creating 30% or more bare ground will dissuade more species of mice. This should, in effect, reduce the number of predators coming to a field. Dr. Dale Rollins of Texas A & M says to thwart quail predators by providing shrub clumps within softball throwing distance of each other.



5. The landscape of Missouri has changed to favor turkey, deer and many predators. We have gone from brushy, weedy draws and fencelines with lots of bare ground about 30 years ago to tree choked habitat overrun by fescue and brome today. Look for yourselves on your own property or as you drive around the country side. How many covey headquarters do you see? Are there bare ground and weeds peacefully coexisting with fescue and brome? The answer to both these questions is the primary reason for the quail demise.

6. The bottom line is that **HABITAT IS THE KEY**. Certainly predators and weather have an impact. But a survey conducted at a landowner tour last fall in Andrew County showed that 60 % of the participants were doing something on their properties for quail AND 60% of respondents were seeing an increase in quail on their property. Let's stop talking about what might be causing the problem and do some habitat work. **BE A PART OF THE SOLUTION.....**  
**RESTORING QUAIL WILL TAKE ALL OF US WORKING TOGETHER.**

Predators are not an issue that we will ignore; future issues of this newsletter will continue to share information from studies on quail predators. We plan to have some trapping and predator calling how-to demonstrations at our fall tour. Finally, the Conservation Department is adding an additional month to the furbearer season next year.



## **Quail Cooperator Demonstration Days**

SEE HOW-TO  
DEMONSTRATIONS ALL  
DAY

Prescribed Burning  
Food Plot Establishment  
Light disking  
Legume and Native Forb Establishment  
Edgefeathering  
Hands-On Shrub Planting  
Calibrate a sprayer and broadcast seeder  
Weed control in shrub plantings  
Killing brome and fescue

**Lunch Provided. Reservations Required.**

***In Case of Rain the Field Day will be Cancelled***

Sponsored by Missouri Department of Conservation,  
University of Missouri Outreach and Extension and Quail  
Unlimited

**Wear your work clothes!!!**

**TAKE YOUR PICK OF THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:**

**March 29, 2003**

**10:00 AM – 3:00 PM**

**Mack Porter Farm in Daviess County**

**From the junction of I35 and St Route B (Coffey Exit) go approximately 8.75 miles east on B to sign at field entrance. Or from the Junction of B and K go 1/2 mile west on B to sign at field entrance. Reservations Required by March 27 by calling the Missouri Department of Conservation at 816-271-3100.**

**April 12, 2003**

**10:00 AM – 3:00 PM**

**Wayne Miller Farm in Andrew County**

**From the Junction of US 169 Hwy and Route D at Avenue City go approximately 14.5 miles north on D past Happy Holler CA to lane on west side of D. From US 48 and D go approximately 1.5 miles south on D. Watch for signs on D Hwy. Reservations Required by April 9 by calling the Missouri Department of Conservation at 816-271-3100**

**April 26, 2003**

**10:30 AM – 3:30 PM**

**Platte Falls Conservation Area**

**Take the I-29 Tracy Exit just North of Platte City, go east, then north on Elm Grove Road to first intersection, turn right on Sharpes Station Rd. Drive about 1.5 miles to Settles Station Rd, turn right and drive to Platte Falls CA. Watch for Signs. Reservations Required by April 23 by calling the Missouri Department of Conservation at 816-792-8662 or the Clay County SWCD at 816-781-5580 extension 3. Turkey hunt in the morning, then join us for the rest of the day to learn how to install quail habitat practices.**

# New CRP is Set Up FOR Bobwhite Quail

Many landowners and sportsman have felt that CRP has been detrimental to quail. It is not CRP itself that is the culprit, but the lack of management on CRP grass cover. Even where we have landowners planting mixes that would be wonderful for quail, the quail do not respond without management of the cover through the years. Bare ground, legumes and weeds are needed in CRP to make it suitable for quail. The buildup of trash in unmanaged CRP favors mice, snakes, deer and turkey AND eliminates quail use. Because of the efforts of several quail states the next CRP signup will be unlike any other for quail. The cards are in place:

- \*30 counties in Missouri are designated part of a Quail Conservation Priority Area  
This will allow 30 additional points for producers signing up for certain quail mixes

- \*Mid-contract maintenance(disking, strip herbicide and burning) is required on new contracts and optional for existing contracts. Treatments are cost-shared at 50%.

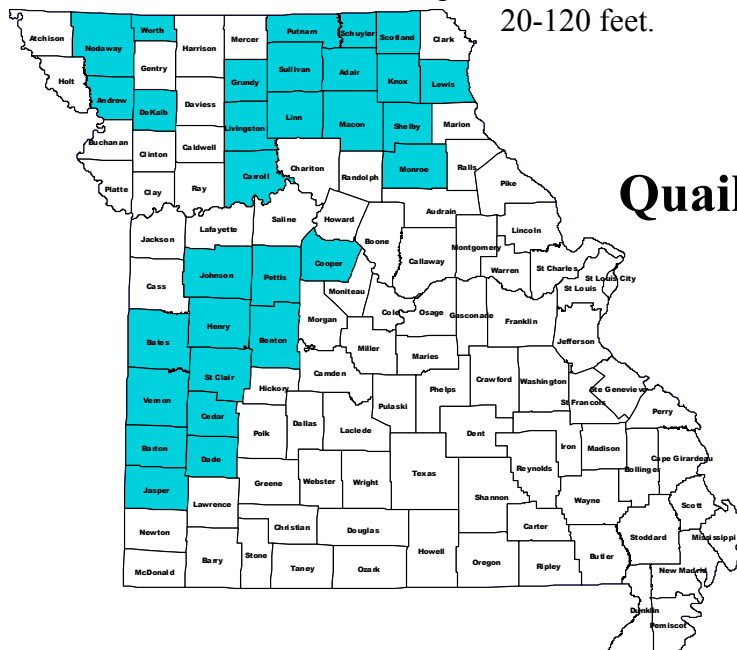
- \*Producers can get other additional points for quail friendly practices

- Prairie restoration mixes
- Fescue conversion
- Food plots

- \*Field borders can be signed up into CRP as in the past. Please consider this option(North Carolina increased quail populations 3-fold on farms where field borders were installed). Georgia reports similar success. Even shrubs could be a portion of a field border planting.

This is the greatest opportunity to help quail since CRP started in the 1980s. As of this writing, the signup is slated for April, 2003.

A new practice in CRP that will also be useful in developing quail habitat will be offered in the Continuous CRP and is called Marginal Pasture (Wildlife Habitat). While much of the details of this practice is yet to be released, we do know that pastureland adjacent to streams and other water bodies is eligible. The width of the strip along the stream must be 20-120 feet.



**Quail Priority Area**

## **Don't Forget This Spring To:**

- \*Light Disk by the end of April(the earlier the better)**
- \*Get food plot seed, herbicide and fertilizer ready for planting season**
- \*Spray musk thistle and teasel while in the rosette stage**
- \*Over seed legumes after light disking or prescribed burning**
- \*Spray fescue and brome after greenup**
- \*Be ready when shrub seedlings arrive, have the ground prepared**
- \*Postpone burning of native grass to late summer or fall for best results**

### **HELP WANTED**

Mark McCombs is offering to provide labor to anyone needing an extra hand. Contact him at 816-753-19889(office).

Mark Pursell of Clay County is interested in exchanging labor. Contact him at [mpursell@planetkc.com](mailto:mpursell@planetkc.com) or 816-781-9580.

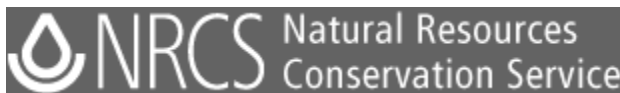
### **SHOTGUN DRAWING**

The Quail Unlimited – Heartland Chapter drawing for the 21st anniversary QU Charles Daly 20 gauge shotgun will be held April 12 at the Quail Demonstration Day at the Wayne Miller farm in Andrew County. Contact Quail Unlimited to buy tickets at 816-567-2650. In case of rain it will be held at the May Quail Unlimited meeting.

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